SWAMPGAS

Michelle Joy Gallagher Soffe- Poetry

Jake reviews: DEGRAVED - Spectral Realm Of Ruin

Full Metal Forecast

Ira

Guest Cover Artist - Ali Gillespie

The Forest Cats by Blackened Green

Heavy Metal Fantasy Art Story

Winter 2025

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Traveler beware! Here in the swamp you'll find a collection of lost souls from across the known world that have each been condemned throughout the daylight lands for channeling forbidden sorcery with their arts. Blackened Green taunts your black and withered heart with a new tale that explores love, magic cats, and deception. Jake peers into the darkness with Seattle death metal conjurers, DEGRAVED. Fletch illuminates a path through the fog with his Full Metal Forecast of upcoming releases, and Ira weaves a magical message from beyond. Do not fear these deranged outcasts however, our featured artist, Michelle Joy Gallagher Soffe will summon your spirit back from the darkness and return you to the stars with her sacred poetic incantations. And, don't miss our special alternate back cover by our special guest artist, Ali Gillespie!

~ BG

When

Ibofanga,

Hesaketvmese

Breathed life

Into the

Red clay

From the

Nunne Chaha

Could he

Have known

In all wisdom

What terrors

Would

Wait under

Brother moon

Sister sun.

Cvhēcetskes

Pull me out,

Mold me

Away from

this.

A cruel

Machine,

Time devours

And wastes

Reclaims

Our incarnation

So that even

Moments of

Suffering

Become

A precious

Condition

Ever splendid

The stars

Provide

A premonition,

A relic, and

A recognition

Etched upon

The skin of

Night,

Time haunting

Itself.

Three Questions For

Michelle Joy Gallagher Soffe

How did you get to where you are now?

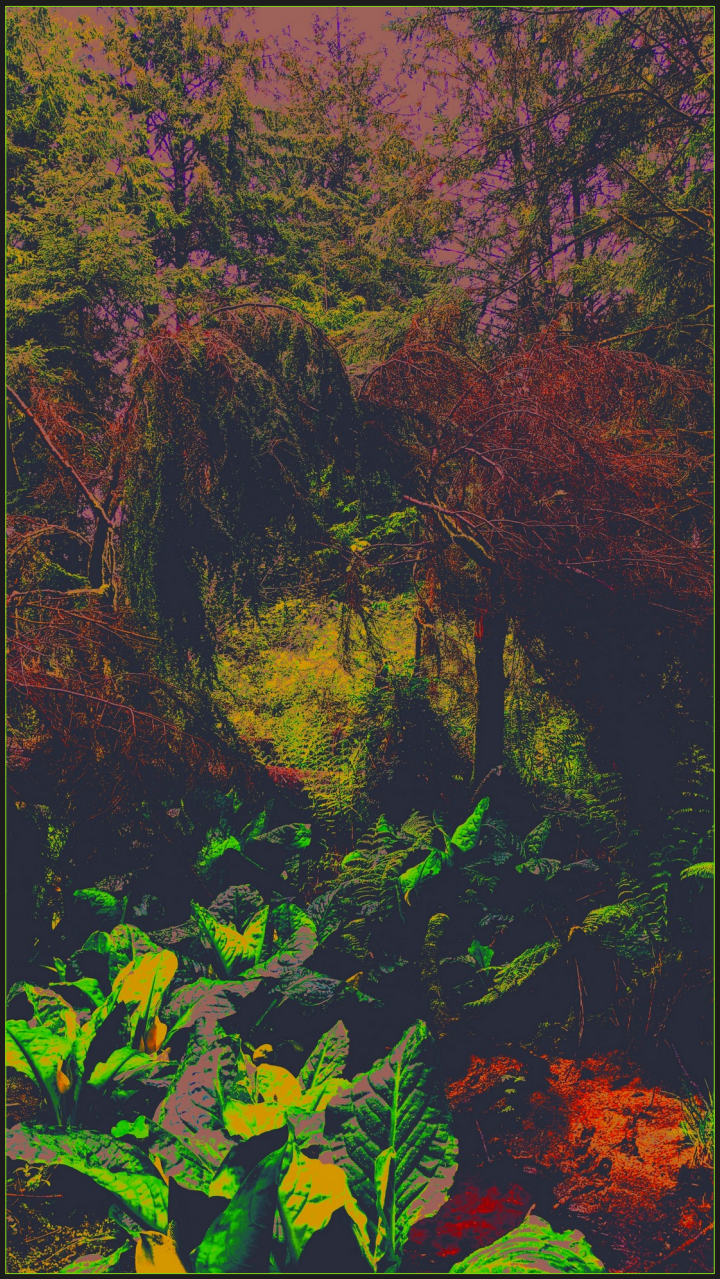
I am coming from a place of great wounding. An achingly slow twist of a knife over the course of a lifetime. A reckoning and a recognition of great joy that can inhabit even the darkest parts of hell.

Where are you in this moment?

I am weaving words toward healing. Every poem is a piece of shrapnel pulled out. Without poetry, I would be even more insane than I am now.

Where do you see yourself going from here?

Toward the light. Always and ever.



You reside

In the

Vanishing

Ley lines

Between

Tomb and

Henge.

They quarried

The stones

In your stead,

Carried them

Over rivers

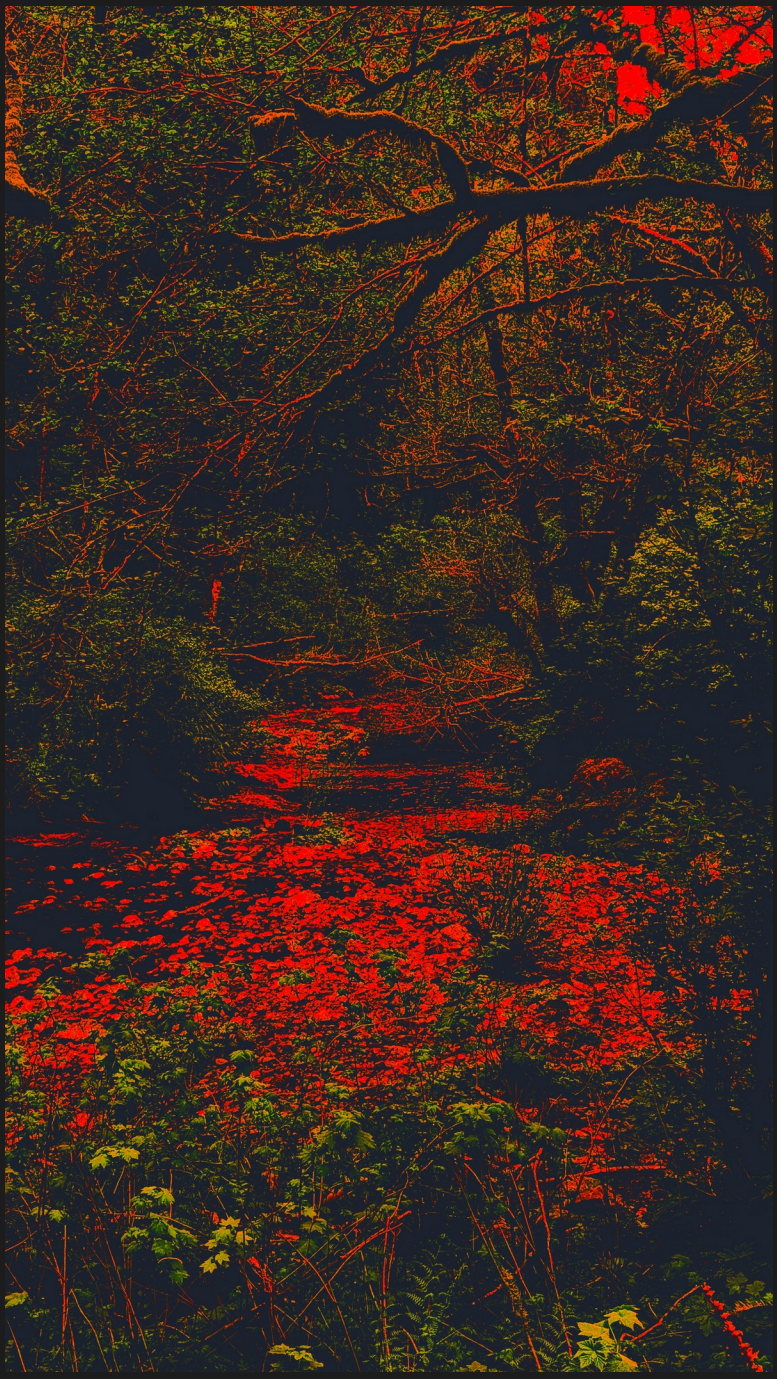
And rough hewn

Landscapes,

Graven with

The pull

Of your name.



Degraved
Spectral Realm of Ruin

A few years back, vile cretins from the underbelly of Seattle got together, named their unholy union Degraved and set out to take the world by storm with demos, an EP, a split, and now their first full-length collection of foul hymns-- each describing grotesque abominations more horrifying than the last.

Spectral Realm of Ruin is seven depraved dirges of grueling, cavernous fare that can also pick up tempo here and there to be fairly fast and galloping at times-- just how great death metal should be (when that metal has the proper dynamics, as these songs certainly do).

The first sonic offering on Spectral Realm of Ruin is "Pariah of Death & Darkness", which smashes out of the gate with a relentless barrage of blast beats and growls. There's excellent panning and guitar flourishes and squeals all over everything here - even some great, audible plodding, churning basslines.

The songs all skulk, crawl and gallop at a satisfying pace, and should satisfy devotees of Slugathor, Demilich, Immolation, Morbid Angel-- all that heavy, old school death. Three of these were on Degraved's rehearsal demo promo, Premonition of Blasphemy, from earlier this year.

Track five, "Unseen", is intense -- and is one of the wildest songs on the album. It's over seven minutes long, and there's synths throughout it, and demonic-sounding choir sounds. And then the whole thing comes to a strong, lurching finish with "Vacuous State".

Every time I listen to Spectral Realm of Ruin, the album always comes to an end far too soon. I firmly believe Degraved is one of the best metal bands around today, and I'm psyched to see what gruesome nastiness they conjure forth next. If you like death metal, be sure to give this one a spin.

~ Jake

DEGRAVED is:

NE - Vocals, Bass, Rhythm Guitars
MM - Lead Guitars
LP - Drums
DZ - Lead Guitars

Recorded and mixed by NE at Deadpan Audio in Shoreline, WA.
Mastered by Marcus Ferreira at No Master's Voice in Copenhagen, DE.
Art by Hidris.
All riffs and lyrics by NE except track 3 - riffs by JW and NE.

sun stone metal bone. forget not fathoms deep veins of ore, veins yours. forget not iron-filled kinship bonds. red-celled oxidization. bones mineral, blood metal. this animism literal, physical. no belief, just breath and body. this world itself is true. this salt & chalk inside your core, at rest, at rust since long ago. just as plant kin can, their cell green photosynthesis within, akin. our dyads dear. then mycelium, the not one. its blood older and closer to stone. then lichen, twin aunties single-minded. don't mind them while they eat, taking their time, glacial-paced, janus-faced, stone erased, replaced with soil. this not magic enough for you? still craving spirit? needing greater, something else and other? – if this sun stone metal bone is not enough – then maybe see what magic means in your book, and if it's in your book or body, oh dear one. daughter and son, you already belong. and there are teeming multitudes of kinfolk, vatic and numinous with twilit earthlight, of which you already are one, among many, no less a monarch, already belonging, already home, unlocked, entangled, already become – so please, my kin, open your sweet red-grapefruit heart halves, sound your clumsy bell, long-since un-dumbstruck and rung, and feel this – wouldn't you rather dance and dance? wouldn't you rather love? ask about the wheres and hows, roam the heres and nows, and leave the whys to sky-searchers with their paths of birds, their ever-spiralling gyres? the falconer is already forgotten. our kin be. be subscendent, be chthonic, be resplendent. be in nooks and crannies. these grannies, fecund-feral, undeterred and unimpeded by our hubris, our forgetting them, their as-yet-unanswered invitation. these aunties whose breath blows our lungs like a woodwind, whose blood plays in our veins with slow meander, whose long game, long reach, long span stretches through our sinews to the faraway nearby. these long unwindings, last ones standing, loved ones waiting, joining you in a yawning amen, all-in, and onwards, ever onwards.

~ Ira

HAILS&ALES

Full Metal Forecast

The year may be drawing to a close but a new one is on the horizon. As the Earth turns on its axis it brings with it new opportunities and more new music to soundtrack our lives. So here are a few new releases that are released in the next few months to get 2026 off to a roaring start.

First off is something to blow off the cobwebs and well, bludgeon you awake. Released on 30th January, Belorussian brigade Eximperitus bring their third album to our speakers. Released on Willowtip Records, this is an uncompromising nine track slab of death metal that any fan of the genre will appreciate. Displaying dynamism with tempo changes and use of lead guitar and even clean vocals, albeit sparingly, they never allow things to feel stale.

The second album that I'm highlighting for the upcoming months is to be released on 13th February by US blackened thrash mob Malefic. A band that have been around for quite a long time and honed their craft in the live environment but they're now back to lay down their first full length. Precise guitar work and pounding drums keep things rooted in thrash throughout but melodic black metal influences are also clearly on display. One that may appeal to those who like a wide variety in their metal.

Speaking of wide variety, the next release has this in spades. Italian band Ponte Del Diavolo defy conventional genre stereotypes and meld together a doom laden, post punk album that also has clear black metal elements. A band with an unconventional dual bass set up manage to create an immersive, tension driven sound that fans of bands like Messa should check out when it's released on 13th February.

Next up, releasing on 16th January is the new album ‘Slay Utterly’ by Carrion Vael. Interesting title, does it indeed slay? Well, technically minded melodic death metal done to a high standard is the order of the day on the US bands fifth album. Technical and sometimes symphonic elements balanced with the heavier side of melodeath leads to a punchy and dynamic record that deserves attention.

30th January sees the release of the debut album by Poland’s Shine. Titled ‘Wrathcult’, the record is brainchild of Hazael’s Tomasz Dobrzeniecki and offers an outlet for various influences across the aisles of both death and black metal. This is a raw, relentless slab of ancient fury based on pre-Christian mythology and spirituality. This has the potential to be one of the extreme metal records of the year, especially if you look for bands such as Behemoth and Rotting Christ.

Firmly rooted in the world of death metal, 30th January is also the release date of Swiss outfit Defaced’s third album ‘Icon’. Although this is death metal at heart it does offer variations in aggression and atmosphere which has helped the band progress their sound further this time out. The band have added new members to the fray which has helped the band explore atmosphere and ambience more. Lyrically the themes explored focus on authoritarianism and mass surveillance. Relatable.

Finally, we have one more release as a little treat. UK four-piece Unburier release a three track EP on 27th February which is a pretty accomplished display of modern death metal showing a level of technicality that fans of bands like Revocation may well appreciate. This band can definitely be classified as one to watch and this EP is a good place to get acquainted.

Creatures Most Foul

There was an astonishing number of great metal releases that emerged from the swamp in 2025. Rather than attempt to constrain these creatures into some illusory hierarchy, Here's a list of the first ten that lurched into my rotten, addled mind when I thought about it

Ashbreather – La Grande Bouffe
#ProgDeath, #Sludge concept album with killer riffs and driving rhythms that tells a fucked up story of greed and consumption.

Ancient Death – Ego Dissolution
Scorching hot, atmospheric #ProgDeath from Massachusetts that absolutely pounds in between cosmic interludes. Not too far from Blood Incantation in tone and talent

Haxprocess – Beyond What Eyes Can See
Florida based #ProgDeath, #DeathDoom that delivers an unrelenting cosmic assault. These epic, lengthy tracks transport you to another plane of existence, a realm of strange horrors and lunacy

Lychgate – Precipice
#AvantGarde, #ProgDeath that released late in the year but went straight into heavy rotation. Lychgate has a haunting quality that blends well with a unique heaviness that sinks it's claws deep into your soul

Onirophagus – Revelations From The Void #DeathDoom from Catalonia. This crushing, deeply atmospheric album seizes you and drops you into a chasm of Lovecraftian horror from which you cannot escape

Dessiderium – Keys To The Palace
#BlackenedDeath, #ProgDeath from Phoenix's Alex Haddad that's about time, innocence, and disillusion and is just a really great #ProgMetal album from a really talented dude

Clairvoyance – Chaos Of Immurement
San Jose based #DeathDoom that does that heavy, atmospheric cosmic death that I can't get enough of. If you like Onirophagus and Sulphur Aeon you'll dig this gut-rearranging assault

Grave Hex – Vermian Death
#DeathDoom #Sludge from Finland. This is a seriously worm-ridden, rotting corpse that you can't help going back for seconds of. Eat it up you sick fucks

Hexrot – Formless Ruin Of Oblivion
#AvantGarde #BlackenedDeath out of Massachusetts that delivers a calculated series of complicated tortures. These demented tracks will carve a labyrinth of madness into your fragile mind. Say goodbye to your loved ones, they won't be seeing you again

Death Obvious – Death Obvious
More #BlackenedDeath #DeathDoom from Finland. Seriously, what's in the water over there? This is a pulsing, rhythmic, riffy slow-death that offers only madness and cosmic bloodlust. Give me more

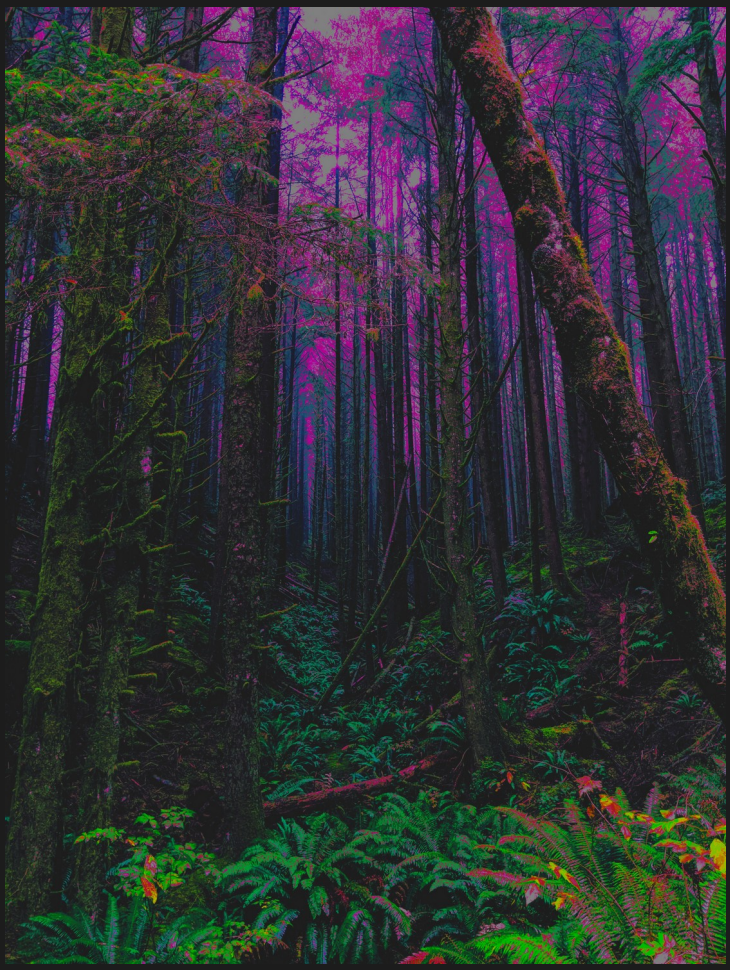
~ BG

The Forest Cats...

…stood in the shadows, waiting for the woman to appear from within the cottage to milk the cow. The small black creatures were at first quite timid when the young couple had moved into the old home and began to clear away the brush and restore the old building together. It was obvious to these creatures of the shadowlands that the lovers planned to stay.

But soon their activity slowed and it was much easier for the forest cats to get the maiden's attention. At first they sent their youngest, the wide-eyed kittens to mewl and rub against the woman's leg while she worked. Once she started giving the young creatures a squirt of fresh milk from the old cow each morning the others joined in, one at a time until the entire clan was present at the morning chore, mewling and clamoring for attention and milk.

Weeks went by and this became a normal part of the maiden's routine each day. She would labor at first light to milk the cow and feed the hungry forest cats, who by now were quite comfortable outside of the shadows, while her husband would venture into the old woods to forage and hunt. To the cats' consternation however, the man would return each evening and devour whatever remained of the day's milk, leaving none for the hungry forest cats who'd worked so cunningly to secure the valuable food source for themselves



The forest cats began to plot. If they could eliminate the woodsman they could secure a great deal more milk and delicious butter for themselves. They would weave together a sorcery and lure the simple man off the trail that he followed each morning into the old woods. Leaving the trail would certainly mean he'd be transported through the veil and into the shadowlands where he'd be detained for eternity, hopelessly searching for the way home. The maiden would be alone in the old cottage by the stream and the enchanted cats could feast to their hearts content!

The woodsman awoke one autumn morning and after his morning tea and biscuits, he gathered his things, kissed his dear wife on the lips and set out into the woods with his axe. The forest cats followed at a distance, moving quietly as the night. When the man stopped alongside the spring to refresh himself and replenish his flask, their illusion sprang into being.

A black mare stood in the shadows just beyond the small clearing in which the man now stood in wonder. Surely this beautiful animal with eyes like embers belonged to someone? Perhaps the miller who lived downstream from the cottage, where the stream merged with the larger river before entering the sea. The miller had a pair of horses that he used to turn the great stone wheel but these were larger beasts, bred for the labors of man; they were not like this fine animal with the coat as fine as silk.

The enchanted beast snorted impatiently and stepped gingerly towards the man, indicating an injury to the fair animal's foot. The woodsman moved forward to assist the creature so that he could then return it to the miller. He didn't notice the subtle disturbance in the morning light as he stepped forward. The sound of birdsong ceased as he strayed from the path and a fine mist began to weave itself through the briar and bramble surrounding him as he moved toward the enchanted beast. The woodsman was entirely unaware of the sorcery taking hold of him.

As he neared the phantom beast so deviously conjured by the forest cats who now stood watching in the nearby shadows, the creature began to change shape. A trick of the mind, the hunter now began to realize as the beautiful horse began to slowly change shape until it became the tangled roots and upturned earth of an old fallen spruce, overgrown with ferns and young saplings.

The maiden's husband stood alongside the old rotted stump and muttered to himself. He had always been prone to fancies and the illusory horse was quite typical of his active imagination. He turned toward the spring but it was no longer there. The soft gurgle of glittering water no longer danced in the air around him and neither were his possessions to be found.

Years passed and the young maiden carried solemnly on. At first the forest cats delighted in the extra quantities of milk and cheese that were available to them now that the woodsman was no longer devouring such vast amounts. The maiden welcomed their affections as a relief to the consuming sadness that befell her once at long last she accepted the truth that some horrible fate had befallen her beloved. She continued to live alone in the cottage until her terrible grief became an untimely death, but even in death she was not freed from her sorrow and she was doomed to haunt the stone home that she and the woodsman had built together

The forest cats abandoned the old maiden once the milk no longer flowed. The house fell into ruin and the hearth went cold. The woman's bones turned to dust. The years passed until there was only a husk remaining of the house and the love that once grew there, though the fair maiden's spectre held tightly to her lover's memory

Time is not real as you know it in the shadowlands where enchanted creatures roam. A day becomes a week which becomes a year. A century passed while the woodsman wandered through sorceries and conjurations in search of his bride and their cottage along the stream. His mind wandered far afield and he was transformed such that he no longer belonged to the daylight lands; the man became a shadow neither man nor faerie. His memories became tangled with the land and the strange personalities he met along the way. He became one with the magical realm.

The woodsman came into a clearing one day in search of a rare reagent herb near an oddly familiar stream bank. There among the bramble stood the faint remains of an old cottage, hardly more than a crumbled chimney and scattered piles of fieldstone. He glimpsed in the shadows the blossom he sought among the cold ashes of the ancient hearth.

As he stepped across the ruined threshold of this ancient home, a forgotten warmth flooded over and through him. The man felt a distant joy enter his heart before a devastating sorrow took hold and he remembered. The woodsman wailed among the bramble that now presided over his former home. He howled to the sliver of moon that shone in the twilight sky, a moon he had not seen since the deception designed by the jealous forest cats.

While the woodsman wept a specter appeared in the moonlight. The woman who had nightly haunted his dreams while he wandered an unfamiliar land, the woman whose promise of love had carried him through an aeon in the shadowlands. She gathered moonlit mist around herself and the lovers embraced under the wandering stars of the azure night. For a brief moment the threads of their lives were woven together once again in the tapestry of their lives but their reunion was short lived. The very moment their lost love was reconciled, the maiden was required by fate to dissolve into the moonlight and, while memory returned to the old woodsman's mind, time returned to his bones and he aged a thousand lost years and fell into the earth.

~ Blackened Green

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